

# **INCREASING FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN ASSESSMENT**

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## **1. ASSESS FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN ASSESSMENT ON YOUR CAMPUS**

Effective assessment of student learning outcomes requires participation and support from faculty at EACH step of the assessment process. Campus-based assessment plans should be developed and implemented by the faculty members who teach in the General Education program, with the assistance of professional staff and students, and submitted to and approved by the campus's Faculty Senate or Faculty Council.

**HAVE YOU ENSURED THAT FACULTY ARE INVOLVED AT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STEPS OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS?**

**STEP 1. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENT LEARNING.** What should the students know or be able to do?

- Have the faculty responsible for the program and courses to be assessed participated in identifying these goals and objectives?

**STEP 2. IDENTIFY THE PROGRAMS AND/OR COURSES AND/OR TEACHING METHODS INTENDED TO FACILITATE THE ATTAINMENT BY THE STUDENTS OF THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES.**

- Do the teaching faculty know that their programs and courses are responsible for helping students to attain these learning objectives?

**STEP 3. DECIDE HOW TO MEASURE OR DOCUMENT THE OUTCOMES FOR THE STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES.** Consider whether the data that are collected will be useful towards improving and strengthening the programs and/or courses and/or teaching methods (Step 8).

- Have the teaching faculty participated in deciding how the student learning objectives will be measured or documented?

**STEP 4. "PILOT" OR TRY OUT THE ASSESSMENT MEASURES.** In piloting, the focus is not on the results, but on whether the students are following the instructions and understanding the questions appropriately. If not, the measures, instructions, and procedures must be changed.

- Have faculty who are experienced in testing and evaluating students been asked to contribute their expertise?

**STEP 5. ESTABLISH STANDARDS OR CRITERIA, OR AN APPROPRIATE BASELINE, OR A POINT OF COMPARISON FOR THE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES.**

- Have faculty with many years of experience in working with students been asked to advise on the appropriateness of standards, criteria, or baselines?

#### STEP 6. MEASURE OR DOCUMENT THE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES.

- BEST case: Faculty have been involved in Steps 1 through 5, fully understand and support the assessment process, and are pleased to assist with the assessment procedures involving students.
- WORST case: Faculty first hear about assessment when they are asked to give up valuable class time. They refuse to participate in the assessment process.

#### STEP 7. SUMMARIZE, INTERPRET, AND SHARE THE ASSESSMENT RESULTS.

How do the outcomes (Step 6) compare with what was expected (Step 5)? What are the student learning objectives (Step 1) for which the programs and/or courses and/or teaching methods (Step 2) need to be improved? There can also be a conversation about changing the student learning goals and objectives (Step 1).

- BEST case: The faculty have been involved in Steps 1 through 6. They are eager to consider and discuss the assessment results and to use these as a basis for improving their programs, courses, and teaching. Faculty who are experienced at teaching and working together with students provide thoughtful and insightful interpretations of the results. Faculty who have been involved in the assessment process from the beginning are eager to bring the results, interpretations, and recommendations to the attention of their colleagues.
- WORST case: The data, once collected, are never examined in depth. The assessment report, if written, is never read.

#### STEP 8. CHANGE THE TEACHING METHODS OR THE PROGRAM IN ORDER TO IMPROVE AND STRENGTHEN STUDENT LEARNING. Who will ensure that this happens? By when?

- BEST case: The faculty have been involved in Steps 1 through 7. The faculty who are responsible for the programs and courses take the initiative in making changes to improve and strengthen teaching and student learning. They press the campus administration and consider external funding sources to obtain resources for faculty development seminars and additional instructional facilities and materials.
- WORST case: The New York Times features, on the front page, a news story that first surfaced a few weeks ago in your campus's student paper. Despite having strong evidence that the current programs and courses are ineffective in helping students to attain the established learning objectives, the administration and the faculty did nothing to improve or strengthen programs, courses, and teaching. Local newspapers and television and radio stations in your community repeat the story.

STEP 9. ASSESS THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS. For example, consider changes in how the student learning outcomes are measured (Step 3), or raising or lowering the expected standards (Step 5), or strengthening the procedures for involving the students (Step 6).

- BEST case: The faculty who have been involved in Steps 1 through 8 make several excellent recommendations for how faculty participation and support can be increased and strengthened in the future.
- WORST case: No faculty show up for the meeting to assess the assessment process.

STEP 10. ASSESSMENT IS A REPETITIVE CYCLE. RETURN TO STEP 1.

- BEST case: The faculty have been involved in Steps 1 through 9. Faculty who have participated look forward to continuing their involvement. Other faculty on campus indicate they would also like to be included in the assessment process.
- WORST case: The faculty oppose the assessment process and refuse to participate further.

## **2. INCREASING FACULTY INVOLVEMENT REQUIRES ADDRESSING FACULTY CONCERNS ABOUT ASSESSMENT**

Administrators and students, in addition to faculty, sometimes share these concerns about the purposes and procedures of assessment.

### **CONCERN 1. ASSESSMENT IS EVALUATION.**

Reply: "The primary purpose of the SUNY Assessment Initiative is the improvement of academic programs that are responsible for promoting student learning and intellectual growth." \*

Evaluation is a judgment of the worth or value of a program or course. The results are typically useless towards improving and strengthening student learning. Assessment, conducted properly, does not involve evaluation.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 10 of the assessment process can help ensure that the focus stays on improvement of student learning and not on evaluation of campuses, programs, courses, faculty, or students.

### **CONCERN 2. ASSESSMENT INTERFERES WITH FACULTY AUTONOMY.**

Reply: Assessment is not about the faculty and is not evaluation of the faculty. Assessment is about having programs, courses, and teaching be more effective for student learning. The assessment process should be developed by those who are responsible for implementation of the programs and courses that are being assessed--the faculty.

- Effective assessment of student learning outcomes requires participation and support from faculty at EACH step of the assessment process.

### **CONCERN 3. MEASUREMENT TRIVIALIZES COMPLEX STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES.**

Reply: Assessment measurement and documentation can include, in addition to standardized tests and direct measures, student interviews, performance-based assessments, course-embedded approaches, student essays, open-ended questions, and student portfolios.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 5 of the assessment process can help ensure that the assessment measurement and documentation reflects the complexity of teaching and learning.

#### CONCERN 4. WHAT FACULTY TEACH CAN'T BE ARTICULATED IN TERMS OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES.

Reply: The most difficult case is assessment of "critical thinking," which can be assessed as follows:

Does Not Meet Standard--No evidence in students' writing or speaking of consideration of other viewpoints; students' writing or speaking includes logical fallacies.

Approaches Standard--Students' writing or speaking shows consideration of other viewpoints but presents no rebuttal; students' writing or speaking may include logical fallacies.

Meets Standard--Students' writing or speaking includes attempts to rebut opposing viewpoints; students avoid logical fallacies.

Exceeds Standard--Students' writing or speaking includes strong rebuttal of opposing viewpoints; students avoid logical fallacies.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 4 of the assessment process can help ensure that assessment is focused on what the faculty consider important in teaching and student learning.

#### CONCERN 5. ASSESSMENT LEADS TO HOMOGENIZATION OF THE CURRICULUM.

Reply: This is, strictly speaking, not an assessment issue. The issue is the extent to which the teaching faculty have been involved in establishing the goals and objectives for student learning.

- Faculty involvement in Step 1 of the assessment process can help ensure that the student learning goals and objectives do not constrain the best efforts of the faculty in support of their students' learning and development.

#### CONCERN 6. TEACHING AND LEARNING ARE THE SAME THING.

Reply: Teaching and learning are not the same. The faculty can be working hard and doing a good job as teachers, but this isn't the same as whether or not the students are learning.

#### CONCERN 7. GRADES ARE A VALID ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING.

Reply: Grades are not always a valid assessment of student learning. For example, perhaps the teaching is effective and the students are earning high grades--but the faculty member is not teaching to the student learning objectives that have been established for this course. As a second example, perhaps the students are earning high grades--because they learned this material and attained the student learning objectives in a prior course or a course being taken concurrently. Third, perhaps the faculty member is teaching to the student learning objectives that have been established for this course, but the exams and other assignments that are the basis for grades fail to evaluate the students' attainment of those particular learning objectives. Fourth, course grades cannot be a proxy for student learning outcomes because often they include components not directly related to student learning such as attendance, class participation, and extra credit assignments.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 5 of the assessment process can help ensure strong connections between student learning goals and objectives; the programs, courses, and teaching methods intended to facilitate student attainment of the learning objectives; and assessment of those particular learning objectives. When there are strong connections between the student learning objectives and student products such as exams and papers that reflect attainment of those specific learning objectives, then course-embedded assessment procedures can be appropriate (perhaps including student grades).

#### CONCERN 8. STUDENT SATISFACTION IS A VALID ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING.

Reply: It is usually unclear whether student satisfaction reflects (a) students' perception that they have learned a lot, including attaining the learning objectives established for the course, or (b) students' feeling that the faculty member was entertaining, the faculty member was friendly and approachable outside of class, and the course was an easy "A."

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 3 can help ensure that the assessment process is focused on student learning outcomes rather than student perceptions.

#### CONCERN 9. ASSESSMENT REQUIRES RESOURCES.

Reply: "Individual campuses cannot be expected to implement comprehensive and effective campus-based assessment of General Education and the Major without new funding set aside for that purpose." \*

"A paramount responsibility for System Administration is to work assiduously with the campuses and the Trustees to guarantee that assessment efforts receive adequate resources, staff assistance, and funding on a sustained basis." \*

"SUNY System Administration should make a commitment to providing adequate resources on a sustained basis so that campuses are able to develop and implement effective modes of assessment of student learning outcomes." \*

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 10 of the assessment process can be facilitated with appropriate reductions in teaching and administrative responsibilities and with stipends for contributions to the teaching and learning community on campus that extend beyond the usual faculty responsibilities and expectations for faculty.

#### CONCERN 10. FACULTY LACK EXPERTISE IN ASSESSMENT.

Reply: The primary materials for assessment are those with which all faculty are routinely involved--student writing and speaking, student laboratory reports, student learning as shown on examinations, and student performances of various types. On many campuses a few faculty have special expertise in assessment, testing, and measurement procedures. However, on most campuses an assessment program must provide those faculty who will be directly involved with the assessment process with opportunities to gain expertise in assessment and with the full resources essential for effective assessment.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 10 of the assessment process can help ensure that faculty expertise in assessment is strengthened.

#### CONCERN 11. ASSESSMENT DATA LACK RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY.

Reply: The goal of a campus-based assessment program is typically not to produce research results that will be published in professional journals. The goal is to initiate and sustain a conversation about how to improve student learning. For this purpose, assessment measures should have reasonable face validity; should have good inter-observer reliability; and the data collected should be representative.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 6 of the assessment process--and especially Step 4--can help ensure that assessment data are sufficiently reliable and valid.

CONCERN 12. THE ADMINISTRATION WON'T VALUE ASSESSMENT DATA IN DECISION-MAKING. THE ADMINISTRATION WON'T PROVIDE RESOURCES FOR STRENGTHENING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 8 of the assessment process can help ensure that the faculty can present strong, well-documented recommendations to the administration for faculty development seminars and instructional facilities and materials.

CONCERN 13. STUDENTS WILL NOT BENEFIT FROM ASSESSMENT.

Reply: Students should also be involved in Steps 1 through 10 of the assessment process.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 8 of the assessment process can help ensure that student learning is improved and strengthened

CONCERN 14. FACULTY WILL NOT BENEFIT FROM ASSESSMENT.

Reply: Faculty put extraordinary effort, energy, creativity, and time into teaching and helping students. Faculty have a self-interest in knowing whether their teaching makes a difference for student learning. Faculty have a great interest in knowing whether or not their teaching methods are effective in promoting student learning and how these can be strengthened and improved.

- Faculty involvement in Steps 1 through 7 of the assessment process can help ensure that faculty benefit from assessment.

CONCERN 15. ASSESSMENT RESULTS WILL BE MISUSED.

Reply: "This assessment initiative must respect the diversity among SUNY institutions, especially their unique missions and their varied implementations of the SUNY General Education Requirement." \*

"System Administration should publicly disseminate assessment data only through aggregate reporting for SUNY as a whole, or by sector." \*

"Stringent guidelines should be developed and adhered to in order to ensure that confidentiality of assessment data is maintained." \*

"Assessment results should never be used to punish, publicly compare, or embarrass students, faculty, courses, programs, departments or institutions either individually or collectively." \*

"Assessment results should never be used to make public comparisons among groups of students based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other demographic factors. A basic value of the State University is that all students can learn and the University's programs are intended to provide educational opportunities to students as individuals, not by virtue of their membership within a particular demographic category." \*

- Faculty involvement in Step 7 of the assessment process can help ensure that assessment results are reported and used appropriately.

\* Quotations are from the "Report of the Provost's Advisory Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes. Guidelines for the Implementation of Campus-Based Assessment in The State University of New York."